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Van Tachtiger tot Modernist Het Gezellebeeld in de Nederlandse kritiek 1897-1940.

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

1997

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Beijert, R. (1997). Van Tachtiger tot Modernist Het Gezellebeeld in de Nederlandse kritiek 1897-1940. Groningen: Uitgeverij Passage.

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Summary

This thesis describes the critical reception of Guido Gezelle's work in the period 1897-1940. The first date was chosen because the collection of poems *Rijmsnoer om en om het jaar* appeared in 1897. It was the first work of poetry by Gezelle to be discussed at some length in the Netherlands, outside the Catholic press. This is surprisingly late, considering the poet died only two years later. Once the appreciation of this Flemish poet had been awakened, he rapidly became popular in the Netherlands.

One of the first authors to discuss Gezelle enthusiastically was Willem Kloos. The second chapter of this thesis deals with his perception of Gezelle's work. Kloos appears to interpret Gezelle completely according to his own "Tachtiger" (Dutch literary movement of the 1880s) conception of literature, and consequently presents Gezelle as an earlier poet who wrote according to Tachtiger aesthetic principles.

His perception of Gezelle has had a surprisingly large influence on Protestant and Catholic periodicals which (around 1900) were independently striving for identifiably Christian art, to counterbalance new developments in Dutch literature at that time. These periodicals are discussed chapters III and IV. The Protestant periodicals included in the study are: *Ons tijdschrift* and *Bloesem en vrucht*; the Catholic periodicals are: *De katholieke* and *Van onzen tijd*.

The Christian artists were inspired by the ideas of the Tachtigers. Modern literature was having a bad influence on the Christian public in their eyes, which is why they sought a Christian answer to the new literature.

It would seem obvious that periodicals which agreed with the Tachtiger conception of literature, would also approve or disapprove of individual authors in the same way as the Tachtigers. As far as the appreciation of Gezelle's work is concerned this is certainly the case. However, the Christian periodicals appearing around 1900 also had other, more strategic reasons to "annex" Gezelle as a modern, Christian poet. To add weight and credibility to the notion of Christian art, it was necessary to have at least one example of a renowned Christian artist. In this respect the perception of Gezelle of Kloos and the confessional periodicals obviously differed. The Catholic and Protestant periodicals put great emphasis on the Christian aspect of Gezelle's poetry, which had been deliberately ignored by Kloos.

Thus, the first part of this thesis illustrates the large impact of the Tachtiger movement on appreciation of literature in the Netherlands. Chapter V describes the change in attitudes in this appreciation, from the individualistic and aesthetic of the Tachtigers, to a more idealistic and socially conscious view. This chapter deals with the perception of Gezelle's work of Albert Verwey and Frederik van Eeden, besides a number of non-confessional periodicals in which the idealistic, socially conscious conception of literature played an important role: *De kroniek*, *Tweemaandelijks tijdschrift*, *De twintigste eeuw*, and *De beweging*.

Gezelle's work received both attention and praise from Verwey and Van Eeden. They appreciated his use of language and imagery, but he was never a great, idealistic, socially conscious poet to them. They see Gezelle mainly as a poet in the aesthetic (*l'art pour l'art*) tradition of the Tachtigers, a tradition which they rejected forcefully. The "confiscation" of Gezelle by Kloos appears to be so dominant that other authors cannot free themselves from this perception of Gezelle.

Kloos's perception of Gezelle could become this dominant because he was the

first to lay claim on Gezelle's work. Forming this first perception is apparently easier, because it need not oust an earlier, accepted perception. Kloos placed Gezelle's work firmly within his own conception of literature, and constantly reminds readers of Gezelle of this Tachtiger perception.

This restrictive perception of Gezelle's work has had its consequences in its later appreciation in Christian periodicals, which turned their backs on the Tachtiger conceptions around 1915, and followed Verwey and Van Eeden. The first Protestant periodical to follow their idealistic conception of literature was *Opgang*. The Catholic followers of Verwey and Van Eeden were *De beiaard* and (in later years) *Van onzen tijd*. The perception of Gezelle's work of these periodicals is discussed in chapters VI and VII.

The attraction of this new conception of literature is explained easily, considering that the Christian periodicals always viewed the extreme individualism of the Tachtigers with some distaste. Besides, the idealistic literature is concerned with higher values, unlike that of the Tachtigers. Verwey's basically non-Christian "higher values" can easily be considered religious, which is precisely what all Christian periodicals do.

It seems obvious that the confessional periodicals chose the conception of literature which suited their ideas best. However, the motives described above do not seem to be the most important when making this choice. After all, around 1900, young Protestants and Catholics had opted for a Christian form of art which was based on Tachtiger ideas at least in part. It is more likely that the Christian periodicals followed the mainstream conceptions of literature and did not develop their own.

They followed the conception of literature which had the widest support at a given moment, and adapted that to their own ideas, which usually meant adding a Christian dimension. The fact that Verwey's ideas needed far less adaptation than those of Kloos did not hasten the acceptance of the former by confessional periodicals. Substantive reasons for changing the conception of literature were apparently not decisive.

The perception of Gezelle's work in the Christian periodicals from about 1915 is similar to that of Verwey and Van Eeden. Here too, Gezelle could only be interpreted as the Christian Tachtiger, as previously described in *Ons tijdschrift* and *De katholieke*. This perception was of no use to them. The result was that Gezelle's work becomes less and less important in the literary discussions in these periodicals.

The preceding discussion shows that the Christian periodicals reproduce ideas from non-confessional literary circles with a certain time delay. This dominant, non-confessional literary arena, formed by top-ranking periodicals and authors, e.g., *De nieuwe gids* and Albert Verwey, defined the direction to be followed by others at least ten years later.

The last part of this thesis deals with confessional and non-confessional periodicals all of which first appeared around 1920. These periodicals buck the trend described above: both confessional and non-confessional periodicals change course simultaneously.

Chapters VIII and IX treat the Protestant *Opwaartsche wegen*, and the Catholic *Roeping* and *De gemeenschap* respectively. Chapter X deals with well-known periodicals from the period between the First and Second World Wars: *Het getij*, *De vrije bladen*, *Forum* and *De stem*. It also describes the perceptions of Gezelle's work of Paul van Ostaijen and Eddy du Perron.

In *Het getij* and *De vrije bladen* little attention was paid to Gezelle, so it is not possible to speak of a particular perception of his work. The poet was considered old-fashioned, even more so than in earlier periodicals. In the Christian periodicals there appears to be a bit more interest in Gezelle than in non-confessional periodicals, but here

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too, there is a steady decline in the attention his work receives.

There is no clearly defined perception of Gezelle's work in *Forum*. His name is only found in the Flemish section, and even for Flemish authors publishing in *Forum* Gezelle was a poet from an earlier era. The perception of Gezelle's work of Eddy du Perron deserves separate attention. Following his friend Paul van Ostaijen, he discussed Gezelle's work within a modernistic framework, paying particular attention to Gezelle's purely lyrical poems.

Gezelle's work received most attention by far in *De stem*. Dirk Coster and Urbain van de Voorde created a compound image of a "Verweyan", visionary poet combined with the 20s image of an artistic genius who had been cleansed by his conflict-ridden existence.

Despite the attention in *De stem*, the inevitable conclusion is that by 1940 the perception of Gezelle has evolved from that of a Tachtiger discovery to that of a canonized, but old-fashioned poet. Kloos's perception of Gezelle can rightfully be considered the most dominant. A perception which contributed to Gezelle's fame, but, because of its persistence, ultimately lead to diminished interest.